

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 ALGIERS 001560

SIPDIS

BAGHDAD PASS TO HWG - MARK WILDERMUTH

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/26/2015

TAGS: [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [AG](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: MINISTER DELEGATE MESSAHIEL CONFIRMS ALGERIAN
EMBASSY IN BAGHDAD STILL OPEN

REF: A. ALGIERS 1538

[1](#)B. GERMAIN-SIEVERS E-MAIL 7/25

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Marc Sievers, Reason 1.4 (b) (d)

[1](#)1. (S) Summary and Comment. Minister of State Abdelkader Messahiel confirmed to Charge and UK Ambassador Tesoriere July 26, in a meeting held at our request, that the Algerian Embassy in Baghdad remained open officially. Messahiel said there had only been three Algerian diplomatic staff in Baghdad, and with two kidnapped it made sense to evacuate the remaining diplomat, as well as the wife of the kidnapped Charge, Ali Belaroussi, to Amman. Messahiel welcomed U.S. and UK offers of support and assistance to Algeria and said, "We are fighting the same enemy and need to work together." In response to Ambassador Tesoriere's comment that the Iraqi government was concerned that Algeria not appear to be withdrawing from Iraq under terrorist pressure, Messahiel agreed it was important "not to hand the terrorists a victory" by withdrawing from Iraq. Messahiel noted that Algeria had extensive experience in combatting terrorism, and suggested that the Algerian intelligence service was "pursuing every route" to determine which sources were credible. Charge noted that the GOA had not yet responded to our request, delivered by Charge to MFA on July 23, for GOA officials working on this issue to be in contact with the Hostage Working Group at Embassy Baghdad (see ref a). Messahiel appeared to be unaware of our previous request, but instructed his assistant, Ambassador Aiouaz, to follow up. We and the British remain puzzled at the GOA's hesitancy to engage us directly in Baghdad, but our joint sense in Algiers is that Messahiel's reassurances about the embassy represent an important indication of GOA determination not to give in to terrorism. End summary and comment.

[1](#)2. (C) As previewed by ref (b) e-mail from NEA/MAG, British Ambassador Andrew Tesoriere phoned Charge the morning of July 26 to ask if the U.S. was interested in delivering a joint demarche to the GOA to seek clarification of various reports in the Arab and Algerian media July 25-26 that Algeria had closed its embassy in Baghdad. Charge agreed the demarche was a good idea, and noted that he would also like to press the Algerians to respond to our outstanding request that they establish direct contact with Embassy Baghdad's Hostage Working Group. Tesoriere and Charge agreed that the demarche should be delivered to Minister Delegate Abdelkader Messahiel. (Note: Messahiel normally is responsible for African and Maghreb affairs, but with Foreign Minister Bedjaoui in London, Messahiel is the senior MFA official in Algiers, and he also had made a press statement July 25 that the Algerian Embassy in Baghdad remained open.)

[1](#)3. (C) Tesoriere and Charge began the meeting by noting the interest and concern with which Washington and London were following news of the July 21 kidnapping of two Algerian diplomats in Baghdad. We stressed that we appreciated the opportunity to meet with Messahiel in order to clarify the GOA position, particularly media reports that Algeria had closed its Baghdad embassy. Messahiel thanked the U.S. and UK for their support and offers of assistance on the ground in Iraq. Terrorism, he noted, has become a global phenomenon and it requires a global response. "We are fighting the same enemy, and need to work together," Messahiel stated. He also expressed appreciation for the security support provided by the Iraqi authorities. Messahiel observed that he had read the statement issued by Zargawi's group earlier in the day declaring that the group's "Shari'a court" had tried the two diplomats and sentenced them to death, but he said that such statements were often issued by terrorists to shock and spread fear and were not necessarily authoritative.

[1](#)4. (C) Turning to the status of the Algerian embassy, Messahiel assured us that it remained open. The embassy's staff had only consisted of three diplomats, and now that two had been kidnapped it made sense to evacuate the remaining diplomat and the wife of the kidnapped Charge, Ali Aroussi. Both had left for Amman July 25. Algeria had not closed the embassy, however. The Algerian flag continued to fly in Baghdad, and the embassy was still staffed by Algerian citizens who did not have diplomatic status. In addition, former Algerian Ambassador to Iraq Moustafa Boutourah was based in Amman and was following events in Iraq from Jordan. In response to a question from Tesoriere, Messahiel said

Boutourah had not yet presented his credentials to the Iraqi Transitional Government, but he implied that Boutourah would do so soon. In response to Charge's comment that State Minister Soltani had been interviewed on Arab satellite television and stated that the embassy was closed, Messahel said that only statements released by the Algerian official press agency were authoritative.

15. (S) Tesoriere asked about the "methodology" Algeria was pursuing to free the two hostages. Messahel responded that Algeria had suffered greatly from terrorism; terrorism had been the GOA's top priority for over a decade. The GOA and its intelligence services had a vast experience on which they could draw in order to analyze terrorist incidents. In this case, there were "various routes" to pursue, but expertise was needed to determine which of the routes might be credible in leading to the kidnappers. Charge noted that he had met with MFA Director General for the Americas Chikhi July 23 and given him the name and contact information of Embassy Baghdad's Hostage Working Group coordinator Mark Wildermuth, but so far, no one from the Algerian side had contacted him. With all due respect for Algeria's expertise, the U.S. and the UK, along with the Iraqis, were the ones with capabilities on the ground and we needed to coordinate urgently in order to avoid any mistakes or working at cross purposes. Messahel appeared surprised and unaware of Charge's July 23 meeting, but he instructed his assistant, Ambassador Aiouaz, to follow up. Charge gave Aiouaz Wildermuth's name and contact information. In response to Charge's request for a point of contact at the MFA, Messahel identified Director for Information and Communications Abdelhamid Chebchoub as the head of the MFA's crisis working group. We will follow up with Chebchoub July 27.

SIEVERS